

Applicant Name Big Horn Conservation District (BHCD)
Project Name Montana Regional Coalbed Methane

Project Abstract

Coalbed Methane (CBM) is a new and growing industry, providing jobs and economic growth in southeastern Montana. In the Powder River Basin (PRB) in southeastern Montana, a regional groundwater monitoring program has been developed to address concerns over potential groundwater changes that may occur as a result of CBM production. The monitoring program is supported by the county conservation districts, U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology (MBMG). The monitoring program documents baseline groundwater conditions, changes due to CBM water production, recovery of aquifers following development, and provides actual data to support decisions and, if needed, to dispel rumors. To provide scientific data and interpretations for decision makers, in support of the CBM Protection Act and the environmental impact statement (EIS), required monitoring data include water levels and water quality in wells and spring flow rates.

The goals of this project are (1) to provide groundwater data in support of CBM development decisions and (2) to actively involve landowners in data collection for their private wells and springs. Data collected will be publicly available through the Groundwater Information Center (GWIC). Monitoring by landowners will greatly expand the network to include private wells and springs and will directly support the CBM Protection Act (HB 572, 2001 legislative session).

The project will be administered by the BHCD, with technical services provided by the MBMG. Landowner workshops will be coordinated by the BHCD.

The project area includes roughly that portion of the PRB where CBM is most likely to be developed in Big Horn, Rosebud, Powder, Custer, and Treasure counties. Monitoring is focused in those areas and along the groundwater flow direction.

The anticipated life for the project is 24 months, beginning July 1, 2007.